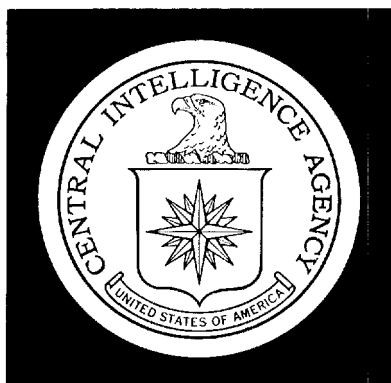


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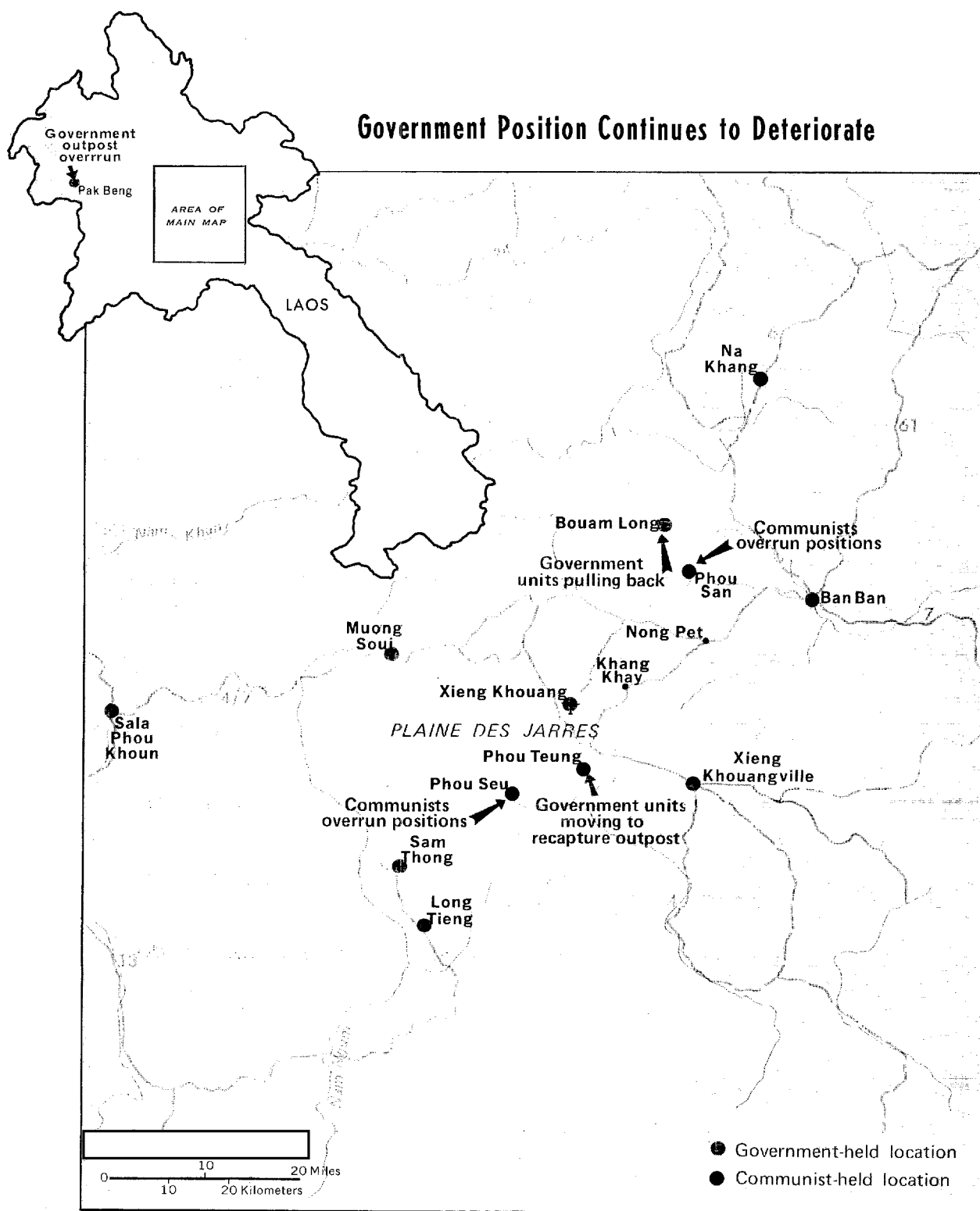
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[Laos: The government position in the Plaine des Jarres area continues to deteriorate.

On 15 February Communist forces captured Phou Seu, situated some 20 miles northeast of Vang Pao's headquarters at Long Tieng and the highest mountain on the southwestern edge of the Plaine. The loss of this position, coupled with the enemy capture of Phou San north of the Plaine yesterday, gives the Communists control over most of the significant terrain features overlooking the eastern half of the Plaine.

Small government units continue to fall back to the Xieng Khouang airfield, swelling the number of troops there to nearly 1,000. Some of these troops are not now an effective fighting force, and unless they are moved to a less exposed position, a strong Communist attack could result in heavy government casualties. Sporadic enemy shelling of the airfield continued on 16 February, but no major ground action has developed. [REDACTED] enemy troops are all around the airfield, however.

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Government troops pulling out of the Nong Pet area are beginning to straggle into the government staging base northeast of the Plaine at Bouam Long.

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Vang Pao also is moving two guerrilla battalions southeast across the Plaine in an attempt to recapture Phou Teung, a commanding terrain feature lost to the enemy on 13 February. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] a large enemy unit is now occupying this strategic mountaintop.

Meanwhile, in the northwest, Pathet Lao forces on 12 February overran the remaining government outposts near Pak Beng. The capture of these positions caps a long Communist campaign to clear the government from the Nam Beng Valley. [REDACTED]

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Thailand-Cambodia: Bangkok and Phnom Penh appear to be making the most serious effort in several years to restore diplomatic relations.

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[REDACTED] Both governments are stressing regional cooperation as the foundation for their security. Since Bangkok withdrew its support of the anti-Sihanouk Khmer Serei guerrillas last year, the major remaining obstacle to rapprochement has been Sihanouk's demand that the border recognition statement precede negotiations.

Phnom Penh has previously indicated its interest in a compromise. Both governments have spoken of a Sihanouk visit to Bangkok to complete the deal.

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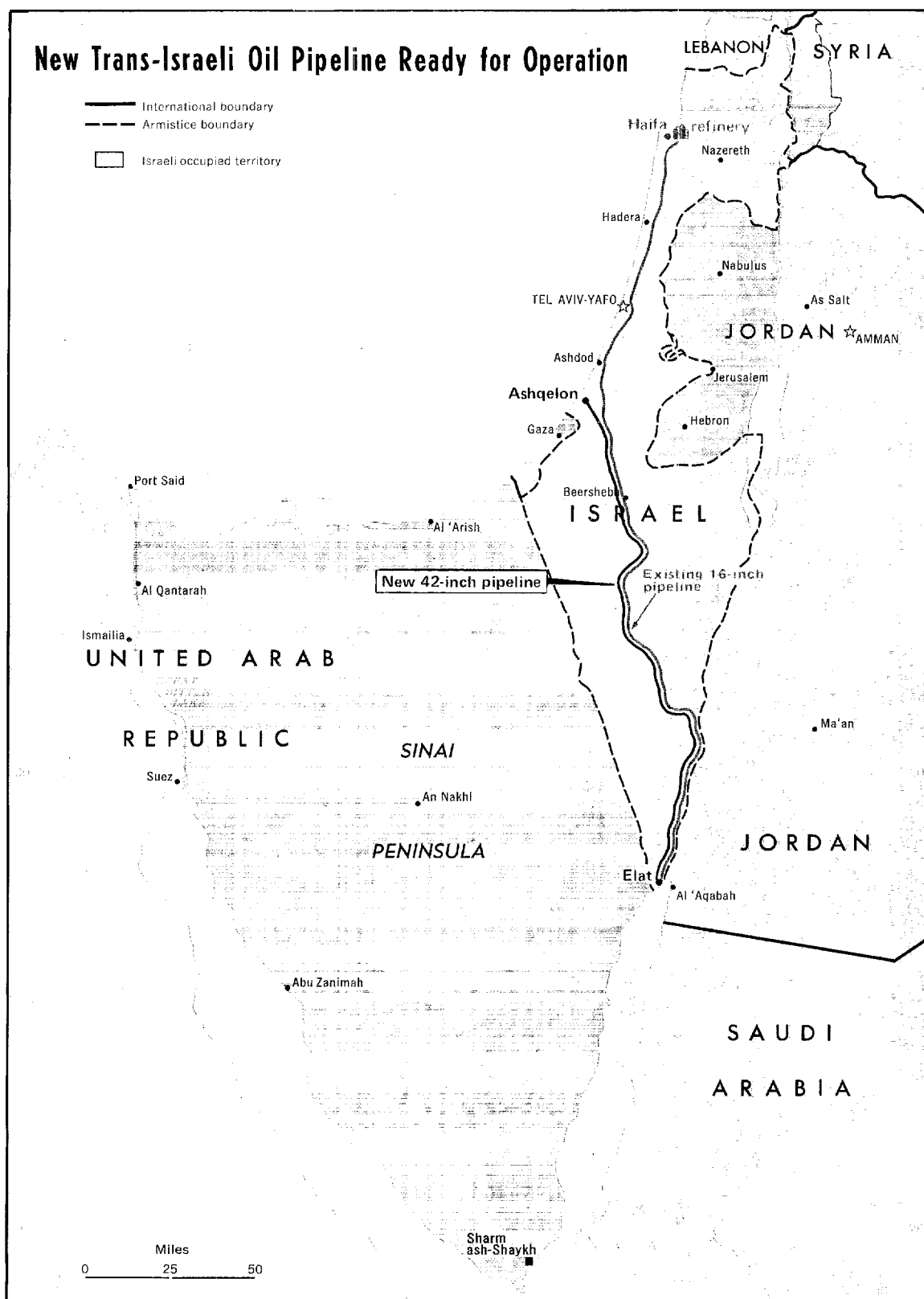
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Israel: The new Trans-Israel oil pipeline is now ready for use, but it is unlikely to operate at capacity in the near future.

The line, which has been under construction for 18 months, was being tested in late January. According to an official Israeli announcement on 15 February, oil had arrived at Ashqelon, the northern terminus of the system. The 200,000 tons of crude oil needed to fill the line apparently were obtained from Iran and transported to the southern terminus of Elat by a new Israeli tanker.

The Israeli announcement signals the completion of the first stage. This reportedly cost about \$50 million and will provide an annual capacity of about 20 million tons. A second stage, planned for completion in 1975, would increase the capacity to 50-60 million tons at an additional cost of about \$60 million.

The full capacity of the first stage, however, probably will not be utilized for some time. Israel's current domestic demand for oil is less than five million tons and could be serviced through the old 16-inch line. Oil companies with interests in the Arab countries are unlikely to use the new system, and current supplies of oil in the Middle East not under the control of such companies are insufficient. Only Romania has openly shown a willingness to import oil through Israel. Last year Romania imported about 750,000 tons of Iranian oil, of which about 500,000 tons passed through Israel's old pipeline system.
(Map)



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USSR: The editorial board of Novy Mir, the last bastion of Soviet liberal intellectuals, has become the latest victim of the conservative campaign against unorthodox thinkers.

Four liberal members of the board were replaced by more orthodox writers. Aleksandr Tvardovsky, chief editor of the monthly publication since 1958, resigned, reportedly believing that the new members would undermine his policies. Tvardovsky, 60 years old, is ailing and in recent years his role as a symbol of liberalism has been more important to the magazine than his editorial and literary contributions. His replacement, V.A. Kosolapov, a moderate former editor of Literaturnaya Gazeta, apparently was a compromise choice.

The changes in the editorial board climax a series of attacks on Novy Mir by literary conservatives. Last summer, Tvardovsky and Novy Mir were accused of "cosmopolitanism," a particularly odious charge used in the Stalin years. Novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who was expelled from the Writers' Union last November, is the most prominent victim of the campaign against unorthodox thinkers. Novy Mir and Tvardovsky introduced Solzhenitsyn to Soviet readers in 1962 and published most of the works he was able to get into print.

It is unlikely that Novy Mir under Kosolapov's leadership will continue to be the outspoken proponent of liberal ideas that it has been in the past. On the other hand, it probably will not become as ultraconservative a journal as Oktyabr is now under Vsevolod Kochetov's editorship.



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Dominican Republic: President Balaguer may soon declare his intention to seek re-election in May.

The President's recent actions have left those opposed to his re-election with little if any hope that he will step down at the end of his term. He has maneuvered for congressional support, has ousted foes from the ranks of the governing Reformist Party (PR), and has probably encouraged the unabashed military and civilian campaigning for his re-election. Last Friday Vice-President Lora, a frustrated presidential aspirant, tacitly acknowledged Balaguer's success by announcing his de facto resignation from the PR in order to lead a newly recognized political party. Lora contends that "the masses" will follow his example, but he is not likely to obtain many defections.

Balaguer can legally enter the campaign as late as 1 April, but he may announce sooner. He has convoked a party national assembly for 25 February, and it reportedly will issue a unanimous call for his re-election. Last year Balaguer used an Independence Day speech on 27 February to hint at his availability for re-election, and the national holiday would offer a convenient date to launch his drive for renomination.

Balaguer's announcement, whenever it comes, will signal a significant upswing in electoral activity and could possibly set off urban violence. Balaguer's foes are already bickering among themselves, however, and their ability to mount an effective electoral challenge is questionable.

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Tanzania: The government intends to move much more quickly than anticipated to take over the country's import, export, and wholesale trade operations.

When President Nyerere announced on 5 February that the government planned to take over the trade network, he said it would proceed slowly to mitigate disruption. The US Embassy has now received information, however, that Nyerere wants the State Trading Corporation (STC) to take control by May. The National Bank of Commerce has already begun a credit squeeze on Asian traders who have long dominated trading.

The embassy has also learned that the STC has orders not to purchase any of the trading companies, pay for "good will," or assume debts. Many Asians, consequently, will be driven out of business without any compensation unless the STC buys their fixed assets.

The STC is already hard pressed to manage its affairs and is short of trained personnel. A speedy take-over, therefore, could result in severe disruptions of the distribution of consumer goods.

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NOTE

Turkey: Prime Minister Demirel has until the end of February to form a new government and has told newsmen that he would have no announcement until next Monday at the earliest. Demirel has gained the support of several independents and presumably will try to form a government in his own right before seeking a coalition. Meanwhile, the disciplinary board of Demirel's Justice Party is preparing to expel from the party the 41 defectors who sparked the crisis. Parliament is in a holiday recess until 24 February, but members are standing by on the outside chance of a sudden call for a vote of confidence.

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